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NAPOLEON ON THE EVE OF THE BATTLE OF AUSTERLITZ
(See Article page 31)

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THE AUSTRIAN IIIRD CORPS ACTION ON 17 MAY, 1809

by Marc Raiff and Jean Lochet

One of the most audacious Austrian maneuvers during the Campaign of 1809 is hardly mentioned - if at all - in some history books. If successful, that maneuver would have cut Napoleon's line of communications.

In early May, as the main Austrian army (less V, VI and II Reserve Corps south of the Danube) retreated through Bohemia, small rearguards drawn primarily from III corps (weakened in the early battles) covered the retreat. Archduke Charles decided to leave III Corps, now under the command of FZM Kolowrat, behind to cover Bohemia from incursion and to demonstrate against the Danube crossings into Upper Austria. The main army continued on toward Vienna. Though III corps had been reduced in numbers, it was reinforced by several newly raised Bohemian Landwehr units. As of May 6, its order of battle was as follows:

STRENGTH

Division FML Somariva:

Brigade GM Radivojevich:

Grenzregt. #12 Deutsch-Banater (2 batt.).....	799
Grenzregt. # 9 Peterwardeiner (2batt.).....	469

Brigade GM Crenneville:

Jägerbataillon #5.....	656
Jägerbataillon #6.....	545
Ulanenregiment #1 Meerveldt (8 squadrons).....	830

Division FML Vukassovich:

Brigade GM Schneller:

Husarenregiment #4 Hessen-Homburg (8 squadrons)....	840
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Brigade Oberst Giffing:

Infanterieregiment #7 Schröder (3 batt.).....	1533
Infanterieregiment #56 Colloredo (3 batt.).....	1854

Brigade Oberst Wratislaw:

1. & 2. Prager Landwehr (2 batt.).....	640
1. Berauner Landwehr (1 batt.).....	418
2. Berauner Landwehr (1 batt.).....	640
1. Kaurimer Landwehr (1 batt.).....	653
2. Caslauer Landwehr (1 batt.).....	469

Division FML St. Julien:

Brigade GM Pfanzerter:

Infanterieregiment #12 Manfredini (3 batt.).....	1724
Infanterieregiment #23 Würzburg (2 batt.).....	786

Brigade GM Bieber:

Infanterieregiment #20 Kaunitz (3 batt.).....	1415
Infanterieregiment #38 Württemberg (2 batt.).....	644

Brigade Oberstleutenant Spork:

1. Taborer Landwehr.....	763
2. Taborer Landwehr.....	684
2. Chrudimer Landwehr.....	670
1. Caslauer Landwehr.....	825
4. Königgrätzer Landwehr.....	625

Attached directly to III. Corps:

Brigade GM Oberndorf:

1. Pilsner Landwehr.....	615
2. Pilsner Landwehr.....	642
3. Pilsner Landwehr.....	764
1. Chrudimer Landwehr.....	638
4. Chrudimer Landwehr.....	626
2. Königgrätzer Landwehr.....	661

Artillery: 9 batteries totalling 50-60 guns (specific assignments unknown).

Total: 39 battalions.....20791 infantry
 16 squadrons..... 1670 cavalry

(Source Kriegarchiv via Krieg 1809, vol. IV, Appendix XIV.)

As previously mentioned, one of Kolowrat's primary assignments was to threaten French communications by demonstrating against the Upper Austria Danube crossings. On May 9 and again on the 13, Charles urged to Kolowrat to cause diversion on the Danube and specifically mentioned Linz/Urfahr as possible targets.

Meanwhile, the French main army under Napoleon was busy preparing the crossing of the Danube. A cavalry screen was sent toward the east and the south. Vandamme reenforced by Pajol's cavalry was to prevent an eventual Austrian crossing in the direction of Tulln. Actually, and fortunately for Napoleon, Vandamme's VIIIth Corps was still around Linz.

As a matter of fact, Napoleon was very well aware of the problem caused by his ever-lengthening line of communication. He had to guard, not only against the possibility of Charles turning back against that line, but also against dangers to it from the insurrection in the Tyrol and Vorarlberg and also from raids, etc.

Napoleon took great care to secure the line of the Danube by setting a line of defense along the critical points. For that he made Davout, certainly his best Marshal, commander of Upper Austria. He was assigned Vandamme to fortify the bridgehead at Urfahr opposite Linz. Davout informed Napoleon of the difficulties regarding a bridgehead, which he claimed would be commanded at musket range from the heights above, the latter too expensive for occupation. Finally, the bridgehead was fortified by constructing a triple line of works on the left bank.

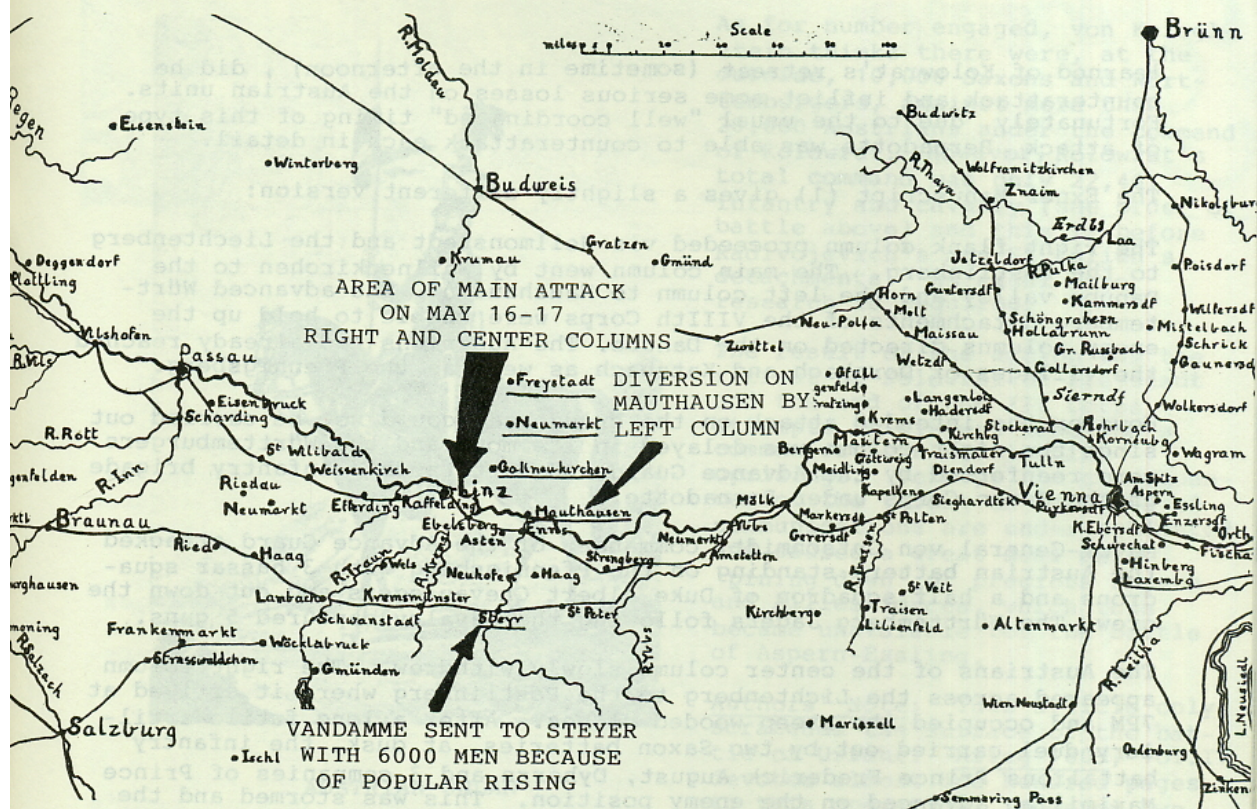
Because of the advance toward Vienna, Davout was ordered to move on. Vandamme was instructed on what to do. Orders were issued for Dupas and Bernadotte to march on Linz.

At noon, on the 17th May, according to Exner (1), Bernadotte with the Saxon Advance Guard and the 1st Division arrived at Linz, while the 2nd Division was at Efferdingen. Only part of the VIIIth Corps of the Grande Armée was at Linz, since 6000 men, under General Vandamme himself, had to be detached and sent to Steyr to deal with some popular uprisings. The remainder of the VIIIth Corps (perhaps 6000 men) had to cover the Danube crossing at the Urfahr bridge-head opposite Linz and send detachments in the foothills beyond.

On May 13, FZM Kolowrat and III. Korps began to move toward Linz from Pilsen, staging through Budweis. GM Radivojevich was left at Eger with two line battalions (Grenzregiment #12?) and twelve Landwehr battalions (Brigades Spork and Oberndorf?) to cover the Bohemian border (Eger had been raided from Saxony although there was no threat at this time.)

He intended to demonstrate against the Danube, as ordered, throw the enemy back from the right bank, inspire insurgency in Upper Austria and pin the enemy forces there.

On the 16th, FZM Kolowrat entered Freystadt and Neumarkt. There, he decided on a general attack on the bridgehead opposite Linz at Urfahr on the 17th. Two columns, under FML Somariva and Vukassovich, were to



MAP OF THE DANUBE VALLEY SHOWING THE AREA OF THE AUSTRIAN III. CORPS ACTIONS AGAINST THE LINZ BRIDGE-HEAD ON 16-17 MAY, 1809

attack it on either side, whilst a third column, under FML St. Julien, was to distract the enemy's attention from the point of attack by an advance on Mauthausen. Only a weak reserve was kept under Kolowrat's control.

Petre (3) gives us the following version:

On the 16th he was at Neumarkt,¹ and there decided on a general attack on the bridge head of Linz on the 17th. Two columns, under Sommariva and Wukassowich, were to attack it on either side, whilst a third, under St Julien, was to distract the enemy's attention from the point of attack by an advance on Mauthausen. A strong reserve was kept in hand.

Just as the two first columns were attacking about 2 P.M., news was received that the head of Bernadotte's corps had arrived at Linz from the direction of Passau. Thereupon, Kolowrat at once abandoned the idea of the attack and decided on retreat on Gallneukirchen. Bernadotte had reached Linz at 7 A.M. with the Saxon

cavalry and an infantry brigade. Presently they were reinforced by the Wurtembergers, and Bernadotte in the afternoon crossed by the bridge. The Austrian column attacking the east side arrived first before the bridge head. Bernadotte at once fell on it and drove it back with considerable loss. Then he turned on the other column and served it in the same fashion.

The result was the retreat of Kolowrat on Freystatt. Bernadotte says he lost 400 or 500 men, and the Austrians show a loss of 883 and four guns. As for numbers, Binder v. Krieglstein thinks there were, at the outside, 10,000 Saxons and Wurtembergers, against more than 20,000 under the command of Kolowrat.

Von Krieglstein (2) (whom Petre seems to be quoted almost verbatim except for some possible misinterpretations) states that the Saxons supported the Wurtembergers as they were attacked, i.e. the Saxons reinforced the Wurtembergers, not vice-versa. Only when Bernadotte

learned of Kolowrat's retreat (sometime in the afternoon) , did he counterattack and inflict some serious losses on the Austrian units. Fortunately, due to the usual "well coordinated" timing of this type of attack, Bernadotte was able to counterattack each in detail.

The Exner Manuscript (1) gives a slightly different version:

The right flank column proceeded via Hellmonstedt and the Liechtenberg to the Postlinberg. The main column went by Gallneukirchen to the Danube valley and the left column to Mauthausen. The advanced Württemberg detachments of the VIIIth Corps were unable to hold up the enemy columns directed on the Danube. The Austrians had already reached the villages of Dornbach and Katzbach as well as the Pfennigsberg.

However the intended attack on the bridgehead could not be carried out since the right column was delayed in its move and the Württembergers were reenforced by the Advance Guard and Hartitzsch's infantry brigade of the Saxon Corps under Bernadotte.

Major-General von Gutschmidt, commander of the Advance Guard attacked the Austrian battery standing on the Pfennigsberg with 3 hussar squadrons and a half squadron of Duke Albert Chevaulegers and cut down the crew. The Württemberg Jagers following the cavalry captured 5 guns.

The Austrians of the center column slowly withdrew. The right column appeared across the Lichtenberg to the Postlinberg where it arrived at 7PM and occupied the steep wooded slopes. After a long futile artillery duel carried out by two Saxon batteries, at dusk, the infantry battalions Prince Frederick August, Dyherrn and 3 companies of Prince Maximilian advanced on the enemy position. This was stormed and the Austrians forced to retreat via Gramerstetten to Hellmonstedt.

On the 17th the Saxon 2nd Division came from Efferdingen to Linz and bivouacked on both banks of the Danube while the rest of the Saxons occupied the captured heights around the bridgehead which were soon entrenched.

According to Petre (3) - who is quoting von Krieglstein - Bernadotte estimated his losses at about 400 to 500 men. The Saxon losses were 7 killed, 2 officers and 27 men wounded and 2 officers and 19 men missing and fell mostly on the hussars and IR Prince Frederick. The Austrian losses were estimated by von Krieglstein to be 883 men and 4 guns. According to Kriegarchiv records (Krieg 1809, vol. IV, Appendix XVII), Kolowrat's losses were as follows:

UNIT	DEAD	WOUNDED	PRISONERS	MISSING	TOTAL
I.R.#7	8	57	122	28	215
I.R.#12	4	37	119	25	185
I.R.#23	-	-	1	7	8
I.R.#56	3	50	175	17	245
Grenzregt.#9	3	9	-	19	31
Jägerbat.#5	18	54	24	16	112
Jägerbat.#6	9	50	-	-	59
2.Prager Lw.	-	-	-	7	7
Ulanenregt.	4	5	-	2	11
Husarenregt.#4	-	1	-	-	1
Artillery	-	-	14	3	17
Totals	49	263	455	124	891

Guns: 4 6-pounder cannons and 2 7-pounder howitzers ("ordinary" vs. "cavalry" pieces).



AUSTRIAN UHLAN

As for number engaged, von Krieglstein thinks there were, at the outside, 10,000 Saxons and Württemburgers, against more than 20,000 Austrians under the command of Kolowrat. However, Kolowrat's total command was only 22,461 infantry and cavalry (see order of battle above) and this is before Radivojevich's and St. Julien's detachments. As usual more research is required.

The result of the action was the retreat of Kolowrat on Freystadt and the end of the III Corps attempts to disturb Napoleon's communications and inspire uprisings. Perhaps the consequences of the threat on the line of communications are under estimated and caused a great deal more 'pinning down' of precious French and Allies forces, which thus became unavaialbe for the battle of Aspern-Essling.

Authors' Note: This article only scratches the surface of the battle of Urfahr. Krieg 1809, vol.IV devotes almost one hundred pages to this operation. However, we only have a copy of this volume's appendices. It any of the reader-ship can get a copy of the Urfahr account from Krieg 1809, or any other reliable source, please let us know. Thank you.

SOURCES:

(1) Exner, Motitz, The Participation of the Royal Saxon Army in the Campaign Against Austria and the Military Events in Saxony in the Year 1809, W. Baehsch, Dresden, 1894, (published in German, unpublished translation by Ray Johnson).

(2) Krieglstein, C. Freiherr Binder von, Hoen, Ritter von, Der Krieg Napoleon Gegen Oesterreich-1809, vol.II, 'Aspern und Wagram', Vossische Buchhandlung, Berlin, 1906. Extracts on the battle of Urfahr courtesy of Mrs. Lochet. (see translation in Leona's Corner elsewhere in this issue.)

(3) Petre, F. Lorraine Napoleon and the Archduke Charles.

(4) Hoen, M. Ritter von and Kerchnave, H. Krieg 1809, vol.IV, Aspern, Seidel & Sohn, Vienna 1910 (appendices only).

Can anyone tell men where I can obtain a copy of DuCasse's "Letters Between Jerome and Napoleon"? Contact Detmar Finke, 501 Slaters Lane, Alexandria, Virginia, 22314.